

Soviet airfield for potential use by American forces.

Some observers also point to the sizable and at times restive Azeri minority in Iran as a potential tool if a conflict with the United States or its allies broke out. Azerbaijan insists it will have no part in any military action against the Islamic republic.

Azerbaijan has a reputation of being heavy-handed toward its citizens. Before its November 2005 parliamentary elections, condemned by international observers as flawed, riot police reportedly beat up protesters in the streets and arrested hundreds.

Farhad Aliyev, his younger brother Rafiq, former head of the leading Azeri oil refiner, Azpetrol, and a handful of other officials were summarily arrested on charges of plotting a coup.

The vote itself was marred by irregularities, ballot stuffing and intimidation, according to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Still, President Aliyev was invited to the White House last April. Washington justified his first meeting with President Bush on the basis that his regime is in a different class than autocracies like those in Belarus and Uzbekistan, thus should be engaged rather than left to gravitate toward Moscow or Tehran.

Opponents say corruption and ongoing crackdowns on civil freedoms could have a destabilizing effect in Azerbaijan. They say Farhad Aliyev challenged the political establishment to make free-market reforms, to better integrate with the West, and is now being denied U.S. support.

"We're defending Farhad Aliyev because we defend the ideas he represents," said Murad Sadraddinov, an Azeri human rights activist and former political prisoner. "If we do not support him, we will soon lose everybody like him in Azerbaijan."

Mr. Sadraddinov said he fears the emergence of a more radical brand of Islam if democratization does not take hold, noting the growing attendance at Wahhabi mosques in the capital. One Western official said he saw "the potential," but doubted such an outcome in the foreseeable future.

Appointed by President Ilham Aliyev's father, post-Soviet strongman Heydar Aliyev, who died in 2003 at a U.S. hospital, Farhad Aliyev led a broad campaign to open the economy and reduce the power of state-affiliated monopolists that had long controlled the flow of imports and exports in Azerbaijan.

One of Farhad Aliyev's top priorities was an overhaul of the state customs committee, considered by the Azeri public and business community as a corruption machine. Azerbaijan ranked 130th among 163 countries in Transparency International's latest corruption index.

"Corruption is endemic in this country . . . [and the customs] department has been at the top of the list," said a European official working in Azerbaijan who deals directly with the government on reform matters.

Farhad Aliyev "was generally regarded as a fair and good businessman, even among a disillusioned Azeri public. The West rightfully saw him as someone to work with—someone with a promising political future."

An intense rivalry soon developed between Farhad Aliyev and customs chief Kamaledin Heydarov, whom Mr. Aliyev accused of stifling economic growth by making it hard for new business—foreign or domestic—to enter Azerbaijan's markets.

Both men used the press to try to win over the public and President Aliyev. Azeri news reports agree that state interference was reduced in entrepreneurial activities and certain meddlesome agencies were abolished.

Ali, 23, a university student who asked that his full name not be made public, said Farhad Aliyev was well liked at a time most Azeris had tuned out politics.

"He came across as someone who actually cared about people and change, not his bank account," said Ali. "His popularity was definitely growing . . . and is probably why he was removed."

Farhad Aliyev went out on a limb when he said that as far as Azerbaijan's social and economic development are concerned, "Russia is Azerbaijan's past, the West is its future."

On Oct. 19, 2005, weeks after he had told the prosecutor general's office that unspecified criminal groups had threatened to kill him, he was arrested for conspiring to overthrow the government. A corruption charge was later added.

Officials accused Farhad Aliyev of paying supporters of Rasul Guliyev, the exiled chairman of a major opposition party, to stir unrest upon his return from the United States to run in the elections. The charge was based on the confession of ousted Finance Minister Fikrat Yusifov, a reputed co-conspirator, who was released two months later.

Mr. Guliyev has categorically denied the claim or that he ever met Farhad Aliyev. Analysts queried in the capital agreed that such an association was highly unlikely, given their opposing party affiliations.

Charles Both, an American lawyer who represents Farhad Aliyev and his brother, says that since their arrest, the original charges have not been declared in court; no evidence in support of the charges has been offered; no public hearing has been held; and no trial date set.

Azerbaijan's law stipulates that pretrial detention can last a maximum of 18 months, meaning the government has until next month to hear the case.

Farhad Aliyev suffers from heart problems, including hypertension and hypertrophy, but has been denied sufficient medical attention, according to the International League for Human Rights.

To date, his wife and two children have had no contact with him. They say they have been subject to harassment and surveillance by authorities—notably on the day of his arrest when their home was stormed by armed men and valuables were stolen. The family has since moved to a guarded apartment in view of the National Security Ministry, where the brothers are being held.

Meanwhile, the business interests of the Aliyev brothers have been confiscated and sold off to "pro-Russian business enterprises favored by the Azeri authorities," according to a study by Mr. Both, the American lawyer.

He said the charges against the pair are "the direct result of Farhad Aliyev's position in open favor of [Azerbaijan's] integration into the international community, closer ties with the United States, [the] European Union . . . and successful implementation of economic reforms and anti-monopoly policy, all of which run counter the interests of many powerful domestic players."

**HONORING DR. LINDA BURNES
BOLTON FOR HER DISTINCTION
IN THE FIELD OF NURSING**

HON. MAXINE WATERS

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 29, 2007

Ms. WATERS. Madam Speaker, I rise proudly to extend my congratulations to an ex-

traordinary individual—a resident of Los Angeles, California, who in mid-April will become the first African American in the United States to receive the American Organization of Nurse Executive's lifetime achievement award.

Linda Burnes Bolton, DrPH, RN, FAAN, is Vice President and Chief Nursing Officer at Cedars Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles. Dr. Burnes Bolton is a trailblazing nurse leader who has spent her career championing and implementing high quality healthcare for all patients. Dr. Bolton's energy level and commitment to transforming healthcare through nursing solutions are legendary. Not only has Dr. Burnes Bolton studied and written about disparities in care but through her many decades of visionary work on behalf of patients, Dr. Burnes Bolton has contributed to a multitude of improvement initiatives, including health literacy, reductions in medication errors, as well as studying the healthcare system to overcome nursing workforce challenges.

A past president of the National Black Nurses Association, Dr. Burnes Bolton currently serves as the President of the American Academy of Nursing. Through the academy, Dr. Burnes Bolton and her board, along with their distinguished advisory council have just launched their "Raise The Voice" campaign to recognize the contributions nurses have made and continue to make in transforming health care.

Today I stand before you to recognize the contributions made by Dr. Linda Burnes Bolton, an extraordinary leader in the field of nursing.

TUSKEGEE AIRMEN

HON. JULIA CARSON

OF INDIANA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 29, 2007

Ms. CARSON. Madam Speaker, the Tuskegee Airmen were dedicated, determined young men who volunteered to become America's first Black military airmen.

Those who possessed the physical and mental qualifications and were accepted for aviation cadet training were trained initially to be pilots, and later to be either pilots, navigators, or bombardiers.

Tuskegee University was awarded the U.S. Army Air Corps contract to help train America's first Black military aviators because it had already invested in the development of an airfield, had a proven civilian pilot training program and its graduates had performed highest on flight aptitude exams. Of the 994 aviators who trained at Tuskegee Institute, beginning in 1942, only about 385 are still alive. I am proud that one of those living heroes is my constituent, Walter Palmer.

Walter Palmer volunteered for the unit because he yearned to fly and because—"we knew the country was at war, and we felt that we had to put in our time, just like everybody else." Mr. Palmer went on to fly 158 missions during World War II throughout Europe.

Today, Walter Palmer—85 years old—will come to our Nation's Capitol to receive the highest civilian honor given by Congress, the Congressional Gold Medal. He and his Tuskegee colleagues not only volunteered to fight a war, they were the best at what they did and they helped win a war.